

kolchak stalks again

Without Carl Kolchak there would be no Fox Mulder and *The X-Files*. Mulder is but one descendant of this '70s paranormal investigator whose explorations into all things strange and spooky are finally available on DVD.

Back in the mid-seventies, if you were looking for a TV show more left of centre than *The Rockford Files* and *Columbo*, chances are you would have inevitably stumbled across *Kolchak: The Night Stalker* in the dark hours before the clock struck midnight. The series tapped into the demand for the weird and mysterious during a time when reports of UFO sightings, planes vanishing in the Bermuda Triangle and the revelations of *Chariots of the Gods* had piqued the public's imagination.

An investigative reporter working for Chicago's Independent News Service, Carl Kolchak frequently finds himself attempting to solve murders and other crimes for which the police have no natural explanation. As for the supernatural, Kolchak is a lodestone for paranormal phenomena, whether it be ghouls, ghosts, monsters, vampires, a werewolf, swamp monster or Native American spirit; the antecedent of Mulder and Scully, Buffy, Hellboy, Clive Barker's Harry D'Amour and others in the pantheon of paranormal pursuits. More afraid of a dental appointment than the things that go bump in the night, Kolchak's credo is the Conan Doyle/Sherlock Holmes approach: "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must

be the truth" – infuriating both his editor, Tony Vincenzo (Simon Oakland), and the authorities in his ongoing quest for the truth, however unbelievable.

Kolchak's first appearance was in a mass-market paperback by Jeffrey Grant Rice and made his small screen debut in the 1972 telemovie *The Night Stalker*, as played by seasoned actor Darren McGavin. *The Night Stalker* introduced Kolchak on the trail of a Vegas serial killer, who turns out to be a modern day vampire. Attracting the highest ratings for any TV movie of that time, a sequel was quickly commissioned; *The Night Strangler*, scripted by renowned genre author Richard Matheson (*I Am Legend*), involved Kolchak's investigation of a Seattle slayer who has discovered that human blood is the alchemical formula for eternal life.

Such was the character's success after only two appearances that a spin-off series was launched in 1974, with McGavin returning in the title role for a run of 20 episodes. Charmingly dated by today's standards, despite its often hokey monsters, *Kolchak: The Night Stalker* owes its popularity – and longevity – to McGavin's terrific performance in the eponymous role. Sufficiently creepy and wonderfully atmospheric, it's the kind of series that had terrified youngsters surreptitiously peeking through a crack in the door to catch a glimpse of some nocturnal horror before being busted by their parents and sent back to bed. Its indelible influence on the genre, both television and film, cannot be overlooked.

Kolchak: The Night Stalker – The Complete TV Series is out on DVD on July 15.

night stalking



The Vampire (Episode 4)

In a sequel to the original telemovie, a female victim of the Vegas vampire is unearthed – and she's hungry.



The Spanish Moss Murders (Episode 9)

A sleep experiment subject dreams up a legendary Cajun boogeyman.



Horror in the Heights (Episode 11)

A shapeshifting Hindu demon develops a taste for the residents of an elderly community.



The Knightly Murders (Episode 18)

A spectral knight in black armour takes revenge on those who have desecrated his burial place.

